13:Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1957
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church festivals and at wakes, and though they are now bought they are made by hand in a few towns by chandlers who carry on a medieval tradition. One Dublin firm, established in 1488, manufactures large church candles of beeswax by methods which can have changed little with the centuries. In the home the candles were supported in wrought-iron holders or stuck into a turf by the fireside. Tall standard holders, often with adjustable fittings, were designed to give light to the weaver at the loom, and they are most typically found in Ulster (Fig. 28). The fine embroidery which occupied the women in the linen districts must have imposed a great strain on the eyes: there are stories of a single candle serving as a central source of light for a ring of seamstresses, each of whom held her work against a bottle full of water which acted as a magnifier.

In Ireland, as throughout Atlantic Europe, the dresser ranks as the most important and elaborate piece of furniture in the kitchen, and its position is prescribed by custom. It stands either against the side wall or against the partition between kitchen and bedroom. Since this partition is of no great antiquity we can be sure that the original place of the dresser was against the side-wall and that it has developed from, and taken the place of, shelves built into or attached to the side-wall. In part of Ulster it is referred to as 'the shelf'. I have already mentioned the tiers of stone shelves set in the wall which are preserved in the deserted houses of the Slievemore cluster on Achill Island. It is believed that the fashion of open crockery shelves was diffused from the court sideboards of the later Middle Ages in France and England, and it may be surmised that the wooden dresser was readily accepted in Celtic lands to replace wall shelves, from Elizabethan times on. The adoption of delph and tea-drinking in the eighteenth century no doubt accelerated the spread of the dresser, which had become, by that time, an essential part of Irish kitchen furniture (Plate 1). The corner-cupboard, evolving in much the same way from corner-shelves, is another article of furniture with a north-west European distribution. Similarly the coffer or store-chest spread through western Europe from the later Middle Ages onwards, replacing skin, straw, hollowed wood, or basket-work containers.

 [Text continues on p. 93]